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Some factors in the historical development of field cultivation practices in two villages in South Central Niger

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Abstract: In this article, I describe field cultivation work in two villages in South Central Niger. Furthermore, I ponder on the historical factors that have shaped these working practices in this area. In doing so, I pursue three objectives. First, my intention is to develop further the anthropology of work in Africa, which has focused heretofore on the synchronic and systematic aspect of work by investigating the complex and multidimensional history of work practices in a specific African setting. Second, I want to show that the history of work practices in these villages should be conceived in Weberian terms, i.e., as the product of a criss-crossing of material bases, forms of social organization, political factors and culture. Third, my findings allow me to argue that the writing of the history of agricultural production systems in South Central Niger has not yet sufficiently recognised the role of cultural and religious elements that shape the development of field-cultivation practices.

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Some Historical Factors in the Development of Field Cultivation Practices in Two Villages in South Central Niger

Quelques facteurs historiques dans le développement du travail des champs dans deux villages du centre-sud du Niger

JAN PATRICK HEISS

p. 75-120

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Résumés

English Français

In this article, I describe field cultivation work in two villages in South Central Niger. Furthermore, I ponder on the historical factors that have shaped these working practices in this area. In doing so, I pursue three objectives. First, my intention is to develop further the anthropology of work in Africa, which has focused heretofore on the synchronic and systematic aspect of work by investigating the complex and multidimensional history of work practices in a specific African setting. Second, I want to show that the history of work practices in these villages should be conceived in Weberian terms, *i.e.*, as the product of a criss-crossing of material bases, forms of social organization, political factors and culture. Third, my findings allow me to argue that the writing of the history of agricultural production systems in South Central Niger has not yet sufficiently recognised the role of cultural and religious elements that shape the development of field-cultivation practices.

Dans cet article, je décris les travaux champêtres dans deux villes du centre-sud du Niger. Par ailleurs, je m'interroge sur les facteurs historiques qui ont façonné ces pratiques de travail. Ce faisant, je poursuis trois objectifs. Premièrement, j'ai l'intention de développer davantage l'anthropologie du travail en Afrique. Cette approche s'est concentrée sur les aspects synchrones et systématiques des pratiques de travail, alors que j'étudie l'histoire complexe et

multidimensionnelle des pratiques de travail dans un contexte africain. Deuxièmement, je veux montrer que l'histoire des pratiques de travail dans ces villages doit être conçue en termes webériens, c'est-à-dire comme le produit d'un entrecroisement de bases matérielles, de formes d'organisation sociale, de facteurs politiques et culturels. Troisièmement, mes observations me permettent de montrer que l'analyse de l'histoire des systèmes de production agricole dans le centre-sud du Niger n'a pas encore suffisamment reconnu le rôle des éléments culturels et religieux dans le développement des pratiques champêtres.

Indexation

Mots clés : travail, agriculture, Niger, Haoussa, Kanuri-Manga, histoire du travail, paysans, travaux champêtres

Keywords : Niger, Hausa, Kanuri-Manga, agriculture, field cultivation, history of work, labour, peasants

Extrait du texte



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Aperçu du texte

Work is commonly understood to be a goal-oriented activity that implies skills, requires physical and mental efforts, is made on a regular basis and for an extended period. Furthermore, the skills required to work have to be learnt, sometimes over a period of many years (Spittler 2016: 17). Work is therefore an important part of life in any known society. Consequently, we find references to work processes in many anthropological monographs.

However, in most cases, the anthropological authors are not interested in “work processes,” as such, because their main interest lies elsewhere and a cursory characterisation of these practices is in their interest. This observation also applies to the anthropology of Niger. Mondher Kilani’s and Maman Waziri Mato’s study (2000) *Gomba Hausa*, for instance, deals with land rights, gardening or commercial activities, but does not describe the work practices in depth.

In some cases, authors are more interested in “labour” (*i.e.*, the work-force) as an ec...

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